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53,000 Jerries Isolated in Brittany Are Sitting Out the 'Forgotten War'

'Black Panthers,' French Slowly Whittle Nazi Coastal Garrisons

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On the southern side of the Brittany Peninsula, more than 53,000 German troops are sweating out the war in two pockets at St. Nazaire and Lorient with the expectation of returning to Germany after the war as the heroes who never surrendered.

Their morale seems to be pretty good. They have all the liquor they can drink, they say. If liquor doesn't get up to the front lines it makes no difference. The Jerries up there make their own in ersatz stills which convert potatoes or cabbage or something into strictly high-test stuff.

'Black Panthers' There

All this was described at a Paris press conference by Maj. Charles M. Parr, of the U.S. 66th Inf. Div. The "Black Panther" outfit and the French are hemming the Germans in against the sea and gradually whittling them down.

The Nazis don't like this hostile activity and they are complaining. Maj. Parr explained that they want to live and let live until the war is over.

This phase of military operations in Europe is sometimes called "The Forgotten War." It started in August when the Third Army isolated the Nazi coastal defenses in its sweep across Brittany.

They have been there ever since.

Move Never Came

There were rumors back in December that they were going to try to break out and tear up communications in Brittany if Von Rundstedt got to Liege during the Ardennes offensive. That never came off.

Maj. Parr said it is believed that the pockets are commanded by Brig. Gen. Werner Junck, a Luftwaffe officer. He was active in German airlines in South America and was one of the original 100,000 men in the Versailles Treaty army allowed to Germany after the last war.

It is generally assumed he is a member of the inner circle in Berlin and stands to gain politically if he can hold out. He, himself, has been quoted as saying he prefers to die rather than surrender.

In the "Forgotten War," a number of unsoldierly things seem to happen.

There was the case of a Nazi lieutenant who got drunk on patrol and fell into the canal as he and his outfit sallied out of St Nazaire. In fishing him out, his men gave away their positions and a massacre followed.

There was the Luftwaffe officer who, during one of the numerous truces arranged for the evacuation of civilians from the besieged areas, asked if he could borrow some new Benny Goodman and Count Basie records. His old ones were getting a little cracked and beat up, he said.

Cigarettes are short in the pockets. Maj. Parr said the Nazi officers who attend the truce conferences bring a cigarette with them for the purpose of smoking casually when the Americans light up. It burns down to a stub before they regretfully throw it away.

The U.S. conferees, Maj. Parr said, make a point of chain smoking, tossing away the half-smoked butt as they light the fresh cigarette from it.

"They do seem rather hurt about all this," said Maj. Parr. "Especially when we are brusque."

He said U.S. artillery observers finally spotted the location of the biggest movie in Lorient. They waited until the Nazis were crowded in and then let go with the big guns. This forced the Germans to show their movies in bunkers which hold only 50 men at a time.

"That irritated them no end and we received a number of complaints," Maj. Parr said.

Woe for Nazi Officers

There was also the sad story of Capt. Sonnenburg, the Nazi who got busted. He was busted to private for writing phoney reports of raids he never made. It was also tough on Capt. Kinderred, whom the Nazi higher-ups bounced for stealing his men's rations.

Nazi mail service, is good, Maj. Parr said. The mails come in from Germany by plane.

Submarines bring in oranges from Spain once in a while, Maj. Parr said, and there is movement in and out of the pockets by plane. Sometimes somebody goes back to Germany and sometimes somebody comes in.

Specialist Sent In

There seems to be a shortage of physicians. The Germans dropped a throat specialist by parachute, but the 'chute didn't open, so they had to get another one. The substitute landed safely.

The 100,000 civilians caught in the pockets are having hard times, but are hanging on to their farms, with occasional Red Cross relief. Like their German captors, they, too, are sweating out the war.

The Black Panther Div. is commanded by Maj. Gen. H. F. Kramer, of Little Rock, Ark., who happens to be a graduate of the German War College. He used to argue tactics with German officers. Now, he's out to prove his arguments.

Ringed Foe Complains Of Allies' Hostility, But Seems Satisfied